

[A French Stonecutter]

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Miss Mary Tomasi

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Montpelier, Vt. The Granite Worker French

A FRENCH STONECUTTER

[Rae?] was short and stocky. A reddish brown moustache almost covered his short upper lip; above that his wide rather flat nose was red, too. The painful red of sunburn from outdoor work.

"I take whatever work I can get," he said. "Right now it's WPA. Digging ditches. It's better than nothing. I haven't a family, so I manage to get along with the little I earn.

"I can cut stone. I've done it on and off for thirteen years. I can't say I like it. The pay is good, but whenever I get a chance for other work I grab it. I've seen too many of these stonecutters' lives shortened. I don't want it to happen to me. I went into the sheds in the first place because I couldn't find other work. I still work there once in a while.

"I come here from Canada when I was around fifteen. My mother, sister and I had been living there while my father worked in the Barre sheds. I had one year of high school here in Barre, then I found work helping a bricklayer. It didn't pay much because I just helped a few hours a day. My father had been working in the sheds all his life, he died two years after I quit school. The only reason I went into the sheds then was because I needed more

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money to support [C 3 VT.?] 2 myself and my mother. She was always after me to quit the sheds; I didn't like it anyways so whenever any other job showed up I grabbed it.

"Yes, my father was working here before the big strike. I remember him saying he was ashamed of those French who came in to put a stop to the strike. Some of them couldn't be blamed, he said, they didn't know what it was all about. They couldn't appreciate the dangers of stonecutting, some of them had never seen a shed before, they couldn't understand that these cutters had a right to strike, and that they deserved as much pay as they could get. Many of these strike breakers left Barre afterwards, they were cold shouldered and looked down upon, they couldn't stand it. The ones that stuck to the sheds and are still working feel different about it now. I'll bet you couldn't get one of them to go now to some other granite area as a strike breaker, not for twice the money they're earning. Lots of them are still ashamed of what they did, they don't even want to speak about it; that's why it's difficult for you to get much information from these French. With some of them it was a hard lesson, they learned that from the scabs and the cold looks they got from the people they had to meet and mingle with every day.

"If I had a chance to go in the sheds now, I suppose I would take it, it would mean more money, and leave this job for someone who isn't trained to do other work.

"I'm not married. I room on Maple Street. There are 3 four roomers at the house; one of them is a stonecutter. Yes, he's French. I don't know when he came here, but he's been working in the sheds as long as I've known him which is about ten years. He tells me he was engaged to be married once, they had the date set and all. But one day she up and told him that if he didn't find some other work outside of a shed she wouldn't marry him. Her own people had been in the granite business, and she said she wanted to break away from it, she'd already seen too much [weary?] and sickness. Well this Al, that's his name, didn't know any other trade, besides he was [peeved?], said it was a devil of a time to tell him when the date was set and all, so it ended right there. They never got married. He tells

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me,- and this is the funny part of it, that she was married a couple of years later and to a stonecutter.

“I've lived in several rooming houses. Most of the landladies were wives of Italian or French granite workers. Most of them had good sized families, too. I've noticed that in the French houses the children are made to speak their native language more than in the Italian homes. I lived with some Italian people for a year, the man was my shed boss. The two oldest children spoke Italian fairly well; the three younger ones could understand it, but I never heard them speak it. I don't know why it is, but the French seem more eager to keep their language alive